

DOES THE 2006 QUADRENNIAL DEFENSE REVIEW SUPPORT AMERICA'S ABILITY TO ENSURE ACCESS TO SAUDI ARABIAN OIL?

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**DOES THE 2006 QUADRENNIAL DEFENSE REVIEW SUPPORT AMERICA'S
ABILITY TO ENSURE ACCESS TO SAUDI ARABIAN OIL?**

by

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ABSTRACT

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In February 2006 terrorists attacked the Abqaiq oil production facility in Saudi Arabia, the largest of its kind in the world. This attack is just the most recent in a string of attacks pointing out the growing insurgency in the Kingdom and its potential to drastically cut oil supplies to the West. In 2005 Americans were reminded of their vulnerability to sudden price spikes in the price of fuel as prices rose dramatically. America's economy recovered quickly but the evidence of vulnerability to oil supply interruptions remains. These events cause concern that oil supplies are vulnerable to insurgent attacks, and that Saudi Arabia's large reservoir of oil may one day be under the control of extremists. Can the United States prevent this from occurring? The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) establishes a future force structure that brings into question America's ability to ensure access to Saudi Arabian oil given the threats to the regime and in the region. Will the 2006 QDR forces be sufficient? This paper addresses this question identifying several areas of concern for further analysis and consideration.

DOES THE 2006 QUADRENNIAL DEFENSE REVIEW SUPPORT AMERICA'S ABILITY TO ENSURE ACCESS TO SAUDI ARABIAN OIL?

On February 24, 2006 Al Qaeda terrorists attacked one of the world's most important oil facilities, the Abqaiq processing complex in eastern Saudi Arabia. Although foiled by security forces, a successful attack could have severely disrupted the world's flow of oil for months.¹ Two thirds of Saudi Arabia's oil production or over six million barrels of petroleum per day makes its way to the Persian Gulf for worldwide distribution by way of this huge complex.² This is not the first terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia and is unlikely to be the last. The economic security of the United States and the Western World depend upon reliable access to affordable petroleum. Saudi Arabia is the world's largest exporter of petroleum and holds the largest oil reserves making its security essential to ensuring adequate and affordable petroleum.³

The economies of the world today are more dependent than ever on reliable supplies of energy, primarily oil, gas and coal. These fuels are fundamental to the economic well being of nearly every nation. Without adequate supplies of oil the world's economies, its people, and our security, suffer.⁴ Any long term or severe disruption of petroleum supplies could have an effect greater than the use of a weapon of mass destruction on American soil utterly changing our way of life. Ensuring reliable access to affordable petroleum is essential to maintaining America's position as the world's only superpower.⁵

The security of Saudi Arabia and access to its oil has been considered a vital interest to the United States for decades. In 1980 President Carter codified this in his State of the Union Address and it has since been known as the Carter Doctrine. The doctrine defines access to Persian Gulf oil as a vital interest of the United States and that it would be defended "by any means necessary, including military force."⁶ The first President Bush again cited access to Gulf oil as a vital interest when he issued National Security Directive 54 authorizing the use of force to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Since then America has not retreated from this position nor can it.⁷

Demand for petroleum is greater than ever as worldwide consumption has increased dramatically in recent years while the Middle East, location of the world's largest petroleum reserves, is more vulnerable and unstable than ever.⁸ Oil prices hover between 60 and 70 dollars per barrel, well above historic norms, reflecting the instability of supply and high demand for oil.⁹ This situation exists while the American military is engaged in a Global War on Terror (GWOT) against Islamic radicalism, also centered in the Middle-East. Our Army and Marines remain decisively engaged in Iraq and are unlikely to disengage for years. The recently released

Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) continues to fund the acquisition of major new weapon systems but does not call for an increase in troop strength.¹⁰ American ground forces continue to bear the brunt of deployments and the fighting while little chance of lowering American commitments around the world is apparent.

Is it prudent that neither our military commitments nor our dependence on Middle Eastern oil are likely to lessen in the foreseeable future? Will the military be able to ensure access to Gulf oil, particularly Saudi Arabian oil? Does the QDR arm the Department of Defense sufficiently to defend this vital interest or is America accepting excess risk?

This SRP will quickly establish the importance of ensuring access to Saudi Arabian oil supplies then examine the challenges facing Saudi Arabia. Armed with an understanding of the disastrous effects oil supply interruptions and price volatility create we can better evaluate our risks. This SRP then discusses what military and other requirements may be needed to ensure access to Saudi petroleum. Finally, it asks if the 2006 QDR provides the needed capabilities and what risks are we may have assumed.

Consumption and Supply

Last year Americans again experienced sharp increases in fuel costs as surplus supplies of oil and fuels dwindled. Hurricanes interrupted production while security concerns in the Middle East and Africa raised the price of oil. Cost per barrel soared to over seventy dollars while gasoline exceeded three dollars per gallon in the United States. The price hikes lowered economic output in the United States and raised the possibility of worldwide recession. The effects although not disastrous last year, lowered economic output and reminded Americans of our vulnerability and dependence on oil supplies.¹¹

The uncertainty and volatility of fuel supplies cause higher costs and the economic damage reverberates throughout the world. Oil demand is inelastic in the short term meaning a shortage of supply requires large price hikes to decrease demand. People lose jobs, production decreases, wealth and taxes decline, and people suffer as they divert income to pay for fuel. In the long run economies and people adjust to the new prices but it is the volatility that causes the most worrisome economic effects.¹²

In 2004 America consumed nearly twenty one million barrels of oil per day (bbl/d) or about one quarter of world production.¹³ Saudi Arabia is the fourth largest supplier of petroleum products to the United States behind Canada, Mexico, and Venezuela and supplied more than one and a half million bbl/d in 2005.¹⁴ Global oil production in 2004 was almost eighty million

bbl/d with an excess capacity of less than two million bbl/d. That leaves very little cushion for any unexpected supply disruptions.¹⁵

In the next twenty years world petroleum consumption is expected to skyrocket as the economies of China, India and other developing nations grow. Global demand in 2025 is estimated to be about 120 million bbl/d or over forty million bbl/d more than in 2005.¹⁶

The only country with extensive excess capacity is Saudi Arabia. It is also the only country believed able to expand its production and exports substantially in the future to meet increased world demand. Even after over 60 years of production, Saudi Arabia still holds the largest proven oil reserves in the world, about 268 billion barrels or over twenty percent of world totals. In 2004 Saudi Arabia produced about 10.5 million bbl/d with an estimated surge capacity between 1 and 1.5 million bbl/d. Analysts in both Saudi Arabia and the International Energy Agency (IEA) believe that Saudi Arabia can grow production for many years. Estimated capacity for 2025 ranges from 16.3 million bbl/d to 22.5 million bbl/d. Saudi Arabia has also stated it intends to build and maintain a surge capacity to lessen the impact of oil supply interruptions.¹⁷ Between 2007 and 2025 Russia, the Caspian region nations, Africa, and other Middle East countries will also bring more oil to market. Nearly all of this, however, will go directly to market with little held as a surge capability. These countries will probably continue to seek maximum oil revenues to support development and grow their economies.¹⁸

The critical question is will the House of Saud remain in power? It is under threat from a growing insurgency and a new regime may be less likely to remain friendly to the US or the west. It may still produce and sell oil but regime changes in both Iran and Iraq in the last two decades resulted in drastic cuts in production. Iran's production has yet to equal its level under the Shah while Iraq's production will take years to recover.¹⁹ A regime change in Saudi Arabia could have disastrous effects on the world economy and would spike oil prices in almost any scenario even if oil flow continued.

The Iranian Threat

Saudi Arabia lies on the Persian Gulf, bordered in the north by an unstable Iraq and is just west across the Persian Gulf from Iran. Historically, these three nations have been the major regional powers but Iraq will probably remain on the sidelines for several years. (Janes,2) Iran and Saudi Arabia then are the two major resident powers. Historically they have had a number of differences between them. The primarily Sunni Saudi Arabia overtly supported Iraq against Shia dominated Iran throughout the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war. Saudi Arabia also maintains its close, long term relationship with America and the West, despite objections from Iran. The

Saudi relationship with America continues to act as a counter to Iranian hegemony in the region.²⁰

Iran seems intent on dominating the region and is continuing its nuclear program and to improve its conventional and missile forces. In February, 2006 it restarted its uranium enrichment program and barred inspectors from its nuclear facilities.²¹ It can already target Riyadh (and Tel Aviv) with missiles capable of delivering a 1000 kg warhead. Saudi Arabia is not likely to find comfort in Iran's continued claims that their nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes.²² This alone is destabilizing as the Saudi's may feel compelled to begin their own nuclear program as a deterrent measure or to strengthen its ties to Pakistan or China as a balance to Iran's power.

Iran has continued to modernize its conventional forces since the end of the Iran-Iraq. In that time the dollar value has declined but the investment remains significant. The decline may show awareness by Iran's leadership of their domestic economic weaknesses and the need to increase economic growth. Since the 1979 revolution the population has increased dramatically resulting in a large generation of youths. The leadership is likely to feel unease at a large population of unemployed young and is seeking to maintain employment. Iranian leaders may feel compelled to divert less GDP to military expansion while focusing on procuring a nuclear capability. The nuclear capability could provide greater power relative to the cost.²³

Iran's improvements include the purchase of new T72s tanks and other former Soviet systems. The regular army is large, organized into 4 Corps consisting of four armored divisions, six infantry divisions, two commando divisions, and several separate brigades. Air defense forces incorporate a number of older systems while also possessing a battery of highly capable SA10 surface to air missiles. Perhaps the most potent Iranian ground force is the Pasdaran Inquilab or Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). It consists of about 125,000 members organized into two armored and ten infantry divisions plus independent infantry brigades. They also include some maritime infantry and special forces. The IRGC is composed of the most dedicated revolutionary fighters and can expand quickly tapping into a large reserve of volunteers.²⁴

Iran's Air Force is capable of limited homeland defense relying on older US and Soviet aircraft. The inventory includes about sixty-five Viet Nam era F4s and F5s, about twenty five F14s, and some French Mirage jets. They also have a mix of about seventy five MIG 29, SU 24, and F7 airplanes purchased from Russia and China.

The Navy is primarily a littoral and coastal protective force consisting mostly of smaller patrol boats. Iran, however, purchased three Kilo class Russian submarines adding to their

ability to influence Persian Gulf waters. The Navy also controls twelve batteries of anti-ship missiles dispersed along the Persian Gulf primarily near Kharg Island and the Strait of Hormuz. Put together, these weapons provide Iran a limited ability to interdict shipping and influence naval operations in the Persian Gulf.²⁵

Iran's continued development of nuclear weapons and the missiles to deliver them is most destabilizing. These efforts increase the threat to neighboring countries and to American or other nations that may operate in the region. It is especially threatening to the oil industry as nearly any targeting of the oil infrastructure could wreck production indefinitely. Iran already possesses chemical weapons and most likely has biological weapons, both of which are assessed to be weaponized for missile delivery.²⁶

Any conflict with Iran, however small, could easily result in damage to Saudi Arabia's oil facilities or to tankers in the Persian Gulf. Statements by Mohsen Rezai, Secretary of the Iranian Expediency Council, claim that any conflict with Iran will endanger Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Middle East.²⁷ Any attack or even sanction against Iran by the United States could also result in an attack against Saudi Arabia. These events would undoubtedly cause a hike in oil prices.

Iran's continued sponsorship of terrorist organizations including Hizballah, Hamas, the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the PKK, and possibly others causes great concern. Rhetoric from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad maintains support for these groups further destabilizing the region. Iranian possession of nuclear weapons and their ongoing support for terrorist groups increases the possibility that terrorists will gain possession of such weapons. That would forever change the calculus in the region and is not a tolerable situation for either the US or Saudi Arabia.²⁸

Iran can undoubtedly threaten Saudi Arabia but an attack does not appear imminent. Iran's leaders most likely understand that any threat or attack on Saudi Arabia or on the oil industry will elicit a response from the United States and the West. Even attacks by Iranian supported terrorists could bring on an American response. The Iranian regime's interests lie first with preservation and such attacks may jeopardize their survival. More likely, Iran seeks the ability to respond to American acts in the region hence their growing missile and WMD forces and they will avoid initiating outright aggression unless provoked. Their ground forces are more likely for defense and deterrence rather than for attacking Saudi Arabia.²⁹

Why an Insurgency in Saudi Arabia?

The most serious threats to the Saudi regime today probably lie within from its domestic terrorist groups and their close ties to Al Qaeda. Saudi Arabia has been plagued by terrorist attacks in recent years most recently the attack on the Abqaiq facility mentioned earlier. Other attacks include three coordinated simultaneous suicide attacks in May, 2003 against expatriate compounds in Riyadh. A follow on attack in November, 2003 resulted in the deaths of seventeen Arab expatriates with over 100 injured. Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for these while the Al-Haramain Brigade attacked the traffic police headquarters in Riyadh in April, 2004. Saudi security forces believe this group is allied with Al Qaeda and that this direct attack on the police demonstrated an escalation in the struggle to depose the House of Saud.

After the 2003 attacks the Saudi regime quickly began an offensive against the terrorists with some success. Attacks have continued sporadically, however. Attacks in May 2004, at Yanbu and Al Khubar, were directed against the western and oil interests in those areas. Again Al Qaeda claimed responsibility and also admitted the purpose was to damage economic activity. Several of the attacks show evidence of inside cooperation from either security forces or workers. This same tactic is being used with great success in Iraq and may indicate extreme difficulty in the future in protecting sensitive areas.³⁰

The petroleum facilities in Saudi Arabia may be among the best protected in the world. However unlikely, determined terrorists often find ways to beat security forces. Even partially damaging the Abqaiq facility could cut oil production by millions of barrels a day, enough to significantly raise oil prices and slow economies. With only about two million barrels of daily production to spare there is little flexibility in the supply. Another high value target is the Ras Tanura terminal which can load up to twelve tankers at once. A suicide boat attack here, much like that on the USS Cole, could knock out about two million barrels of production a day.³¹

Al Qaeda leaders understand how important oil production and the flow of oil are to Saudi Arabia and the West. Bin Laden called for a campaign to destroy oil production in Saudi Arabia to remove the infidel supporting regime and to damage western economies. (CSIS,10) Strong links between Iraqi and Saudi terrorists makes it even more probable that the campaign against Iraqi oil facilities has moved to include Saudi Arabia.³² Such a campaign could severely lower production and immediately raise oil prices. It would also discourage further investment in Saudi Arabia; investment required to meet the anticipated increase in oil demand. The end result of nearly any successful attack or campaign in Saudi Arabia will be increased petroleum costs and growing lack of supply.

One might think that an oil rich Kingdom, especially one which distributes much of the wealth to its citizens, would have few problems with insurgents seeking regime change. This is not the case in Saudi Arabia and the reasons are many and complex.

Saudi Arabia's tradition of Wahabist conservatism set the stage for intolerance at the presence of US and western forces during the first Gulf War in 1990 and 1991. The Islamic radicals could not accept the presence of infidel forces on Saudi soil. When not all the forces withdrew after the war the dissatisfaction grew and continues today. Even the complete withdrawal of western forces does not redeem the regime to many radicals including Osama Bin Laden.³³

The next factor is the widespread dissatisfaction among the large population of youths in the Kingdom. Since 1980 the population has grown from seven million to twenty one million. The undiversified economy leaves few employment opportunities beyond the oil industry. Many young men face a future with few job prospects and declining per capita oil revenues. Per capita income has declined from about 17,000 dollars in 1988 to about 8,200 in 2003.

Underlying both issues is an education system that fails to provide either a useful or a universal education even to the male population. Many youths are educated at conservative Wahabist schools which teach elementary skills while emphasizing conservative religious dogma. The university system fails also and prepares few students to enter the economy as engineers, physicians, managers, or other professionals capable of growing the economy. Most university students are still educated in Islamic studies. Between 1995 and 1999 only two percent of those entering the job market possessed any sort of technical degree while an estimated thirty percent of males and fifty percent of females were functionally illiterate. Religious dogma and lack of opportunity have created a large, disaffected, young population.³⁴ Perhaps this helps explain why fifteen of the nineteen 9/11 hijackers were Saudi ?³⁵

Despite these systemic problems the Kingdom is not in immediate danger of collapse. There are 15,000 princes and numerous loyal groups who benefit from the regime's patronage. The Royal family has proven adept at managing its position of power, balancing the competing forces of secularism and religious conservatism. Oil income supports numerous families, tribes, and interest groups that support the regime. The status quo cannot stand indefinitely, however, and Saudi leaders must begin to deal with the internal forces at play.³⁶

Since beginning their offensive against the terrorists the Saudi's have successfully destroyed portions of the terror network. Authorities claim to have killed over 92 terrorists and captured hundreds of suspects since 9/11. Saudi security forces continue working closely with American forces to improve their counter terrorist and intelligence capabilities. Perhaps due to

these successes, the number of terror attacks has declined since 2004.³⁷ The concern, however, is that the most zealous terrorists are fighting in Iraq and when they return they will renew their offensive with even greater skill and determination.³⁸

Saudi reform is occurring slowly. King Abdullah continues to balance between supporting religious conservatives and allowing change. Municipal elections were held for the first time in 2005, and soon more seats in the Shura Council may be elected rather than appointed.³⁹ Education reform is beginning and the government is taking steps to control clergy who step too far out of line.⁴⁰

America faces many challenges in its continued dependence on Saudi Arabia. We must sustain our relationship with the leadership while also supporting reform and assisting the security and intelligence forces in eliminating the terrorists. Pushing too hard for swift reform may upset the delicate balance of power within the Kingdom but insisting on reform is necessary. Our style of democracy, with its various freedoms may not yet be the answer for Saudi Arabia. Supporting Saudi initiatives, maintaining security and access to oil, and ensuring we can protect the oil facilities if needed are clear requirements.⁴¹

What does America do if our supporting efforts are not enough? How or can we do more to support the House of Saud? It remains our best hope of ensuring oil supplies into the foreseeable future. What would or could America do to retain the oil fields if the Saudi regime began to collapse? These are vital questions policy makers must answer. A radical Islamic regime in control of the world's largest oil reserves is not in the vital interest of the United States.

The 2006 QDR

The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review provides a vision of where our military is going and how it will continue to secure American interests focusing on the years 2008 through 2013. The document will influence countless decisions on strategy, force structure, plans, missions, and acquisitions. In sum, the assumptions held in the document will influence our national security posture for years to come as well as our ability to shape the strategic environment.⁴²

The National Defense Strategy released in 2005 forms a base for much of the 2006 QDR. It establishes uncertainty as the defining characteristic of our current strategic environment. Threats will be unpredictable and may arise from nearly any part of the globe in many forms. The United States must prepare for these threats planning against estimates not necessarily known enemies.⁴³ The 2006 QDR tasks leaders to become more agile and adaptive to be ready for unexpected and uncertain events. Our forces must remain prepared to shape regional

strategic outcomes before conflicts arise. In this environment America is likely to ask its military to deploy into uncertain situations and to conduct unconventional, challenging, and risky operations more often than in previous decades.

The priorities set in the QDR are to defeat terrorist networks, defend the Homeland, shape the decisions of nations at strategic crossroads, and prevent hostile and non-states from gaining access to WMD. It recognizes that we cannot fight this long war through kinetic means alone so must use all elements of national power to defeat our enemies. Future threats are expected to exist in the four broad categories of irregular, catastrophic, traditional, and disruptive.⁴⁴

The QDR addresses four central issues that America must face. First, we will need to partner with failing states across the globe to defeat terrorists in their sanctuaries. It is in US interests to have stable nations who can control their populations and territory. Second, defense of the homeland is paramount and this may require preventive strikes on terrorists or others. Third, America must influence the strategic choices of developing nations and those at a crossroads. This will necessarily require more than just DOD participation and is critical in heading off the creation of future enemies. Lastly, we must prevent the spread of WMD which may require operations to conduct regime changes.⁴⁵

The United States may need to conduct each of these in supporting Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom needs US assistance now to shape its future. Regional issues include failing states, the spread of terror networks, and WMD. US efforts now may preclude a catastrophe in the future. The QDR is on target with these points but America may assume excessive risk if not prepared and ready to swiftly commit forces and resources in support Saudi Arabia or others in the region as it becomes necessary.

This QDR also affirms the President's stance on taking early, decisive action to avert catastrophes or larger war. This necessitates maintenance of a decisive and available military capability. The document also commits the US to maintaining its status as the lone superpower and a policy of shaping the world environment to support that future. Lastly, America remains committed to the 1-4-2-1 paradigm in that the United States will defend the homeland (1), deter aggression in Europe, Northeast Asia, the East Asian Littoral, and Southwest Asia/Middle East(4), combat aggression in two of these regions(2), and win decisively in one of them(1).⁴⁶

All of these commitments require robust ground forces in addition to the air and naval arms. All are to be accomplished, however, without a permanent increase in force size. This may point out a major discrepancy between ends and means. Most important to this SRP, will America retain the ability to ensure access to the vital Saudi Arabian oil?

This QDR calls for increases in special operations units and soldiers, greater civil affairs capabilities, formation of a Marine special operations unit, and increased intelligence capabilities. It also requests significant resources to support the services major acquisition programs. It does not, however, ask for permanent increases in the size of the Army or Marine Corps. The QDR mentions force transformation and greater reserve call up flexibility as meeting the need for greater numbers of soldiers or Marines. The two ground forces have already borne the brunt of the long war and will most likely continue to do so.⁴⁷

The QDR and Saudi External Threats

Today, the primary external threat to Saudi Arabia is Iran, which possesses a large and capable conventional force, is developing nuclear weapons, already possesses weapons and probably has a biological weapon capability. Its regional security policies and goals are clearly counter to those of the United States and increase instability in the Gulf.⁴⁸

The United States military is fully capable of dealing with any overland or conventional attack by Iran on Saudi Arabia. An attack through Iraq or Kuwait would meet overwhelming firepower from the air, land, and sea by both US and coalition forces ending in Iranian defeat. Additionally, Saudi, Kuwaiti, and other Gulf States forces have improved markedly in recent years adding to Iran's challenge.⁴⁹ Iran's leaders will probably refrain from an overt attack not wanting to risk near certain failure.

Iran's most likely use of force is in reaction to provocation by the United States. This could be in response to American demands for Iran to stop uranium enrichment or to an American or Israeli strike on the Iranian nuclear production facilities. Iran could respond by temporarily disrupting shipping in the Persian Gulf using its submarines and anti-ship missiles. Its surface to surface ballistic missiles could also target such large oil facilities as Abqaiq or Ras Tanura but unless armed with WMD the effects would most likely be temporary. In either case, there is a probability of escalation and the near certainty of increased oil prices. The point is that Iran will probably prefer these responses or other asymmetric tools such as special operations forces to a ground attack against Saudi Arabia.⁵⁰

Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons would alter the situation completely. It could then hold the entire region hostage by threatening Saudi Arabia or others while potentially limiting American responses with the threat of nuclear attack on the oil fields. This is an intolerable condition and one the United States must avoid. It alters completely the balance of power in the Gulf and decreases any leverage the US or any other powers may have in the Gulf region.

The QDR provides sufficient forces to deter Iranian attacks and to defeat a conventional Iranian campaign. It probably does not provide the forces needed to execute a ground campaign to change the regime followed by nation building. Certainly any post-conflict phase in Iran would require large ground forces, probably larger than in Iraq simply due to the greater population of Iran. If the campaign is the use of air or special operations forces then the QSR may provide sufficient capabilities. It supports continued Air Force improvements and expands the capabilities and size of special operations forces to conduct such a mission.⁵¹ The QDR does not appear to provide the capability to succeed in a ground campaign against Iran without assuming great risk. This may limit American options in the future and increase our risk in a region with a vital national interest at stake.

Iranian supported terrorist attacks pose an additional threat. Barring WMD, however, they are unlikely to cause significant or long term damage to the oil industry. Saudi and allied efforts could thwart an Iranian sponsored terror campaign more easily than a homegrown Saudi insurgency. Such attacks by Iranian surrogates would offer little strategic reward inviting retaliation from the US and Iran's Gulf neighbors.⁵²

The QDR and Saudi Internal Threats

The most likely threat to Saudi Arabia and to American and Western interests is from an indigenous Saudi Arabian insurgency led or allied with Al Qaeda. It is a clearly stated goal of Al Qaeda to destroy the regime in Saudi Arabia as a further step in reestablishing the Islamic Caliphate.⁵³

Al Qaeda and their terrorist allies hope to conduct a terror campaign to destabilize and destroy the House of Saud. A large part of this probably includes attacks on the oil infrastructure similar to what has been done in Iraq. This could lead to the collapse of the Saudi leadership by destroying their monetary base and the Saudi economy while also devastating the economies of many nations. The Saudi regime has been a stabilizing force in the region for decades and its removal would present the west with a near catastrophic situation. No longer could the west count on access to Saudi oil or its surge capacity and the entire region would be subject to radical control.⁵⁴

The ramifications of such events are too extreme for the US to allow. Even the unsuccessful February, 2006 attack resulted in oil price hikes of over two dollars per barrel.⁵⁵ Successful attacks or a long campaign could cause long term price hikes and decrease world economic output. Even a single devastating attack on a large facility in Saudi Arabia could hurt

the world economy for years as it would decrease current production, cut any excess capacity, and discourage further investment to meet demand increases.⁵⁶

The Saudi's have met with limited success in fighting their growing insurgency. Their security forces have improved and grown in response to the insurgents and the intelligence apparatus is extensive. However, the insurgency still continues.

US and other forces are working with the Saudi's to create a better intelligence network and improve security forces. The government is instituting broad changes to encourage economic improvements such as job growth. Other initiatives include an information campaign to counter terrorist recruitment and shifting the education system away from religious dogma.⁵⁷

Bolstering the internal security forces and assisting the regime is preferred to any overt American action. Such assistance is fully supported and resourced by the QDR and these efforts appear to have received increased emphasis and resources. US forces are fully capable of supporting these initiatives now and further enhancing our special operations forces and intelligence abilities will increase our ability to assist indigenous forces. Increasing political, economic, and other assistance may also aid the Saudi's in balancing their approach and solving their internal challenges.

A major concern of any support to the Saudi's is a successful outcome in Iraq. Failure in Iraq would only reinforce the Saudi insurgency. In the event of failure in Iraq the US may be forced to defend Saudi Arabia from the probable Al Qaeda campaign. Certainly we would need to assist the Saudi's further in fighting the insurgents if Iraq failed.

Will the House of Saud overcome its challenges and survive? This remains an unanswered question but America continues to assist the Kingdom in defeating the insurgents. Real success rests with the Saudi's as they must decide which direction to choose. American policy makers need to look at the possibilities of failure or near failure however. How do we ensure access to Saudi oil if the regime fails? Can our military do this mission and will the QDR support this capability over the next decade?

The threat is real and so is the requirement to be able to secure our access to the oil. Additionally, we cannot allow a radical regime to gain possession of the world's largest oil reserves nor can we afford to let the economies of the world be devastated by such an event.

US forces are currently decisively engaged in Iraq, Afghanistan and other areas around the world. In January 2006 there were over 135,000 troops in Iraq, another 30,000 in the Gulf region and about 20,000 in Afghanistan. US forces also remain in Kosovo, North Africa, and Korea, with small elements in numerous other nations.⁵⁸ Both the Army and the Marine Corps have borne the brunt of these operations and these commitments show little probability of

declining soon. The recent rise in violence and threat of civil war in Iraq points out the fragility of that situation and the long term need for US and coalition forces in that country.⁵⁹ The Army and Marine Corps may be fully committed for years to come.

Saudi Arabia is a large country, roughly one third the size of the United States. The major oil facilities are concentrated in the eastern third of the country in an area of about 300 by 200 miles. In the north it borders Kuwait and in the east it meets the Persian Gulf and other Gulf States. In a future scenario the US and western nations may be forced to secure this large area to prevent worldwide economic disaster and to keep radical elements from gaining control of this oil rich area. Securing this region seems a good point of departure for planning as it holds the major oil facilities while avoiding the population center of Riyadh and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.⁶⁰

Collapse of the regime is not imminent but could develop in the near future as insurgents continue their attacks against the government and the oil industry. Oil flows may be interrupted or decline at some point and the Saudi regime may lose its ability to protect the oil industry. Their own security forces could become overwhelmed by the insurgents or even disintegrate. It may then be necessary for American and potentially other nations to protect the oil facilities and ensure the oil flow continues. Ideally this would come at Saudi request.

Using the Iraqi Freedom example as a start point, the force required would probably be at least one full US Corps, at least initially.⁶¹ The dimensions of the area are similar to Iraq and the need to provide both point and area security to the supporting roads, ports, and facilities against terrorist attacks is essential. This requires the large numbers of boots on the ground to secure the facilities, fields, and pipelines. Since protecting the infrastructure and ensuring the flow of oil are the essential tasks the number of soldiers as well as capability is important. Additionally, there would be no Saudi army to grow to eventually take over the security.

Another scenario, but one more challenging, is the potential that the United States must secure the oil fields after the regime collapses. This creates a forced entry requirement as well as quick and decisive action to protect the oil facilities. Again, an Iraqi Freedom size force is probably capable of conducting the operation if it is reinforced with forces to secure the critical oil facilities and ports while preventing their destruction. A burning oil field scenario such as occurred in Kuwait after Desert Storm would not accomplish the essential task.

In either case, US forces could be built up over time at our forward bases in the region as the threat in Saudi Arabia increased. The build up would include ground, air, air defense, naval and other forces similar to the build up prior to Iraqi Freedom.⁶² At the President's order the

forces could secure the critical areas, ideally before insurgents assumed control or were able to damage the infrastructure.

Conclusions

Does the QDR support the potential need to conduct these operations? This paper cannot give a complete answer, only this author's opinion. The answer is a qualified yes but with significant risk. The United States could seize control of the oil areas but would be hard pressed to sustain the operation. With about one third of our ground forces deployed today, adding another Corps requirement (or more) would allow little or no rotation of forces and this would not be a short term mission. In doing this operation America would also assume great risk in other areas of the world. So much combat power would be deployed to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the Gulf region that we may be incapable of decisive action elsewhere. This is especially true for American ground forces.⁶³ The QDR does not provide the size or number of forces, especially ground forces, needed to sustain this operation while continuing other ongoing commitments. This compromises not only America's ability to secure the Saudi oil fields but also to conduct the other operations and requirements in fighting the long war set forth in the QDR. If America's military is committed to secure the oil fields of Saudi Arabia it may compromise its ability to deter or react decisively to resolve other conflicts and our potential adversaries may quickly figure this out.

In several years America may be less engaged in Iraq and the risk may decline affording greater flexibility to our military. We could then more easily support such an operation in Saudi Arabia. The risk may remain significant, however, as long as America retains relatively small numbers of ground forces as supported by the 2006 QDR. The assumption that the United States will commit forces around the world to prosecute the long war, build nations, counter WMD, and other requirements as stated in the QDR also increase our vulnerability in the vital Gulf region. Any sizeable commitment of US forces in one region decreases those available for use anywhere else. The disastrous effects resulting from a failure to protect access to Saudi oil are intolerable to the United States. America cannot fail to defend this vital interest because once Saudi Arabia falls there is no where else to turn.

Sustaining the long war will require significant ground force commitments for some time.⁶⁴ The QDR acknowledges this point, however, reorganizing brigades, while not increasing the overall numbers of soldiers or Marines only addresses part of the issue. Creating more brigades alleviates the stress on individual units but does not increase the number of available soldiers. Additionally, even flexible and agile units cannot remain deployed indefinitely and meet every

challenge if they are not large or numerous enough. This holds true for all forces whether ground, naval, air or other. The added effectiveness of the future combat force equipment is years away and the capabilities unproven. Unconventional warfare and counter-insurgency, our most likely future, have historically required large numbers of soldiers on the ground. These conflicts are not necessarily solved by technical means while the lack of sufficient numbers may even prolong them.

This QDR magnifies the risk to America's security by not increasing the size of its ground forces. Failure in Iraq, failure to defeat the insurgents in Saudi Arabia, or commitment of ground forces to other conflicts limits our ability to maintain access to Saudi petroleum. Failure in Saudi Arabia would have disastrous consequences to the world's economy and our way of life and could allow terrorists possession of the largest oil reserves in the world. Neither outcome is acceptable. Further examination of the risks inherent in this QDR may be needed to avert this possibility or of over burdening our America's military forces.

Endnotes

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⁴⁴ Ibid. Future threats are viewed in a framework structured in four broad categories:

- Irregular threats are primarily unconventional and used by terrorists, insurgents, and like forces to counter stronger forces.
- Catastrophic threats involve terrorist or rogue state use of WMD.
- Traditional threats primarily involve state sponsored military forces.
- Disruptive threats involve future challenges from competitor nations based on breakthrough capabilities which offset US advantages.

⁴⁵ Donald Rumsfeld, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, (Washington D.C.: The Pentagon, 6 February, 2006),3..

⁴⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁷ Ibid,41-61. Special Operations Forces :The QDR increases the size and capability of the Special Operations Forces in order to combat terrorism and wage global unconventional warfare. They will remain the first choice to provide flexible and agile responses. They can also be used to shape nations before they erupt into crisis.

The QDR will:

- Increase active duty SF battalions by one third.
- Increase Psyops units by 3500 personnel.
- Establish a Marine Special Operations Command of 2600 Marines and Navy personnel.
- Increase SEAL team personnel.
- Establish an SOF UAV squadron.
- Increase our capability to conduct insertion and extraction into denied areas.

US Army Forces will continue their reorganization but will not gain a long term increase in end strength.

- The Regular Army will transform to a total of 117 brigades, 42 BCTs and 75 support brigades; the National Guard will transform to 106 brigades, 42 BCTs with 78 support brigades and the Army Reserve will have 58 support brigades.

- The Army continues its transformation to modular units.
- FCS development continues.
- Army end strength stabilizes at 482,400 active and 533,000 reserve by 2011.

The Marine Corps end strength stabilizes at 175,000 active and 39,000 reserves by 2011. Their current force modernization programs also continue.

The Air Force will further improve its long range strike capability as well as its unmanned long range strike forces.

- It will retain the F22 in a restructured program.
- Reduce B52's to 56 to support modernizing other aircraft.
- Restructure the J-UCAS (joint- unmanned combat air system) to develop a longer range, carrier based system with air refuel and expanded payload capability.
- Decrease end strength by 40,000 organized into 86 combat wings. The Air Force will emphasize reach back capability, minimizing forward deployments.

The Navy increases its presence in the Pacific, shifting 60% of its submarines into that area.

- The Navy gains 8 ships in the pre-positioned fleet, enhancing deployment capability.
- Gains an eleventh carrier strike group.
- Establishes a riverine unit for control of inland waters.
- Accelerates building of littoral combat ships capable of supporting near shore operations.
- Gains two attack submarines a year no later than 2012.

Related to supporting deployment operations the QDR also calls for extensive investment in cargo transportability, strategic lift, and pre-positioned stocks. It emphasizes the need for continuing improvement in air lift and tanker fleets.

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